GAMER
RETRO
Magazine
Killer Bites and Megabytes in the Big Apple
RETRO GAMER
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Afro Samurai 2009 video game

The Afro Samurai video game is a stylish action-adventure title based on the critically acclaimed anime and manga series. It's known for its unique blend of Japanese period setting, futuristic technology, graphic violence, and hip-hop soundtrack.

Samurai 2009 video game

Afro Samurai (2009)

Detail	Information
Release Date	January 27, 2009
Platforms	PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360
Genre	Action-Adventure, Hack and Slash
Developer	Namco Bandai Games

Samurai 2009 video game

| Voice Cast |Samuel L. Jackson reprising his role as Afro Samurai and Ninja Ninja and Kelly Hu. |

Soundtrack| Produced by RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan. |

Samurai 2009 video game

Plot and Gameplay

The game follows the core story of the original anime series, adding some extra material and background details for fans.

The Quest for Vengeance:

The plot centers on Afro Samurai,

who wears the Number 2 Headband.

Samurai 2009 video game

He is on a quest for revenge against Justice, the current holder of the legendary Number 1 Headband, who killed Afro's father right in front of him as a child.

The Headband System: In this world, the Number 1 Headband grants god-like power and can only be challenged by the Number 2.

Samurai 2009 video game

However, the Number 2 can be challenged by anyone, meaning Afro must constantly fight off countless foes who want the right to challenge the Number 1.

Hack and Slash Combat:

The gameplay is a fast-paced, hack-and-slash style where Afro uses his katana to slice and dismember opponents.

Samurai 2009 video game

A key feature is the "Focus Mode", which allows the player to slow down time and carefully target specific cuts to slice enemies cleanly in half.

🎮 Samurai 2009 video game

📉 The Sequel Attempt

A sequel was later developed, which unfortunately met a far less successful fate:

Title: Afro Samurai 2: Revenge of Kuma

Release Date: Volume 1 was released on PlayStation 4 and PC in September 2015.

The game was met with extremely poor critical reception and negative user feedback.

Samurai 2009 video game

Due to the failure of Volume 1, the planned subsequent volumes were cancelled, and the game was actually pulled from sale on the PlayStation Store and Steam shortly after its release, with refunds offered to buyers.

Odin Sphere 2007

Odin Sphere is a critically acclaimed 2D fantasy action role-playing game (Action RPG) developed by Vanillaware and originally published for the PlayStation 2 in 2007.

It is renowned for its gorgeous, hand-drawn 2D art style, similar to an animated storybook.

The game is considered a spiritual successor to the 1997 title Princess Crown and takes concepts from Norse mythology.

Odin Sphere 2007

Gameplay and Style

Genre: Action RPG with side-scrolling, beat 'em up-style combat, incorporating RPG elements like leveling, skills, and alchemy/cooking.

Art Style: The game features a unique, lush, and detailed hand-drawn 2D aesthetic by director George Kamitani.

Combat: In the remastered version, Odin Sphere Leifthrasir, the combat is fast-paced, fluid, and combo-heavy.

Odin Sphere 2007

The original PS2 version had a more strategic, stamina-based combat system.

Structure: The story is broken into multiple books, each following a different protagonist, whose individual stories eventually interweave to form a single grand Story.

Odin Sphere 2007

Plot and Characters

The game is set on the fantasy continent of Erion and centers on a war between the nations of Ragnanival and Ringford over a weapon called the Crystallization Cauldron.

The Story follows five protagonists whose pathsand destinies are intertwined as they move towards an ultimate catastrophe known as the Armageddon.

Odin Sphere 2007

The five main characters you play as, each with their own unique fighting style and storyline, are:

1. Gwendolyn: A valkyrie princess and the daughter of King Odin, who wields a spear-like Psypher weapon.

2. Cornelius: A prince from the kingdom of Titania who is turned into a Pooka (a rabbit-like creature). He uses a sword.

Odin Sphere 2007

3. Mercedes: A naive fairy queen who uses a magical crossbow.

4. Oswald: A dark and angsty "Shadow Knight" who uses a massive sword.

5. Velvet: The Forest Witch and a princess of the fallen kingdom of Valentine, who uses a chain-like whip.

Odin Sphere 2007

Remastered Version: Odin Sphere Leifthrasir In 2016, the game received a high-definition remake titled Odin Sphere Leifthrasir, released for PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, and PlayStation Vita.

Refinement: Leifthrasir completely overhauled the game's mechanics, offering much smoother, faster, and more action-oriented combat, and simplifying the tedious elements of the original.

Odin Sphere 2007

Classic Mode:

The remake also includes a Classic Mode that allows players to experience the game with the original PS2 mechanics and difficulty.

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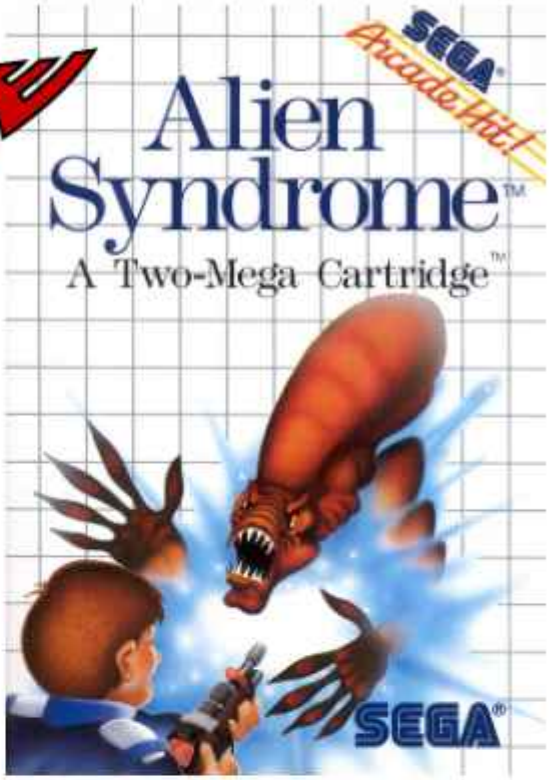
ALIEN SYNDROME



Alien Syndrome

The name Alien Syndrome refers to two distinct video games released by Sega, separated by twenty years the original arcade classic and a later action RPG remake.

1. The Original Alien Syndrome (1987)

The original is a classic of the arcade era, known for its challenging, fast-paced action and sci-fi horror atmosphere.

Release Date: 1987 (Arcade).

Genre: Run and Gun / Top-Down Shooter.

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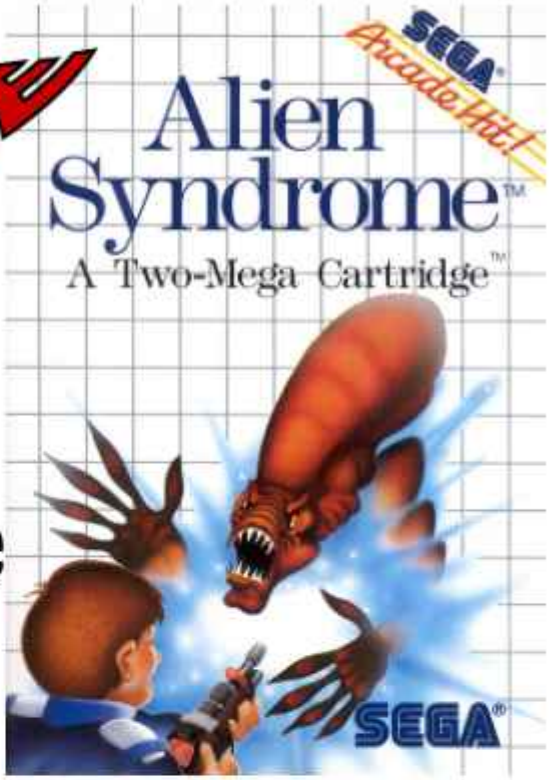
ALIEN SYNDROME



Alien Syndrome

Gameplay: Players control one of two soldiers, Ricky or Mary, and explore maze-like, fixed-screen levels on spaceships and space stations.

The goal of each level is to rescue all the hostages before a timer runs out, and then defeat a boss to proceed.

The original game supported two-player simultaneous co-op.

Platforms: It was ported to a wide range of systems, including the SEGA Master System, Amiga, Commodore 64, NES, and Game Gear.

Alien Syndrome

2. The Alien Syndrome Remake (2007)

A later entry in the franchise was a complete re-imagining of the game, shifting the core genre significantly.

Release Date: 2007

Genre: Action Role-Playing Game (Action RPG)

Multi-Directional Shooter

Platforms: Nintendo Wii and PlayStation Portable (PSP)

ALIEN SYNDROME

Alien Syndrome

Gameplay:

This version is set 100 years after the original and follows a new heroine, Earth Command Trooper Aileen Harding.

The gameplay adopted a top-down, isometric perspective and focused on the Action RPG formula, similar to Diablo.

Players select from five character classes

(e.g., Demolitions Expert, Tank).

You constantly collect loot, manage an inventory of hundreds of weapons and armor types, and invest experience points into stats and skills.

ALIEN SYNDROME

Alien Syndrome

The Wii version utilized the Wii Remote for aiming and supported local four-player co-op.

The 2007 remake was noted for its shift to RPG mechanics, but it received mixed to generally unfavorable reviews, with critics pointing to its monotonous repetition and lack of polish.

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Little Big Planet 2008

The Little Big Planet series is a hugely popular and critically acclaimed video game franchise, best known for its iconic tagline:

"Play, Create, Share."

It is primarily a puzzle-platformer series with strong elements of a sandbox game emphasizing user-generated content.

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Little Big Planet 2008

LittleBIG Planet™

Core Concepts

Players control Sackboy, a small, customizable ragdoll character, through a variety of colorful, physics-based 2.5D levels 2D movement across three planes.

The core games feature a main Story Mode, which is often narrated by actor Stephen Fry.

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Little Big Planet 2008

Create:

The most unique feature is the extensive, built-in level editor, which allows players to create complex new levels, characters, objects, and even different game types (like racing or fighting games) using the collected items and in-game logic tools.

LittleBIG Planet™

LittleBIG Planet™

Share:

LittleBIG Planet™

Creations can be shared online with the entire community allowing players to perpetually explore an ever-expanding library of user-created content.

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Little Big Planet 2008

Main Series Games

LittleBIG Planet™

LittleBigPlanet 2008
PlayStation 3

LittleBigPlanet 2009
PlayStation Portable(PSP)

LittleBigPlanet 2 2011
PlayStation 3

LittleBigPlanet PS Vita 2012 PlayStation Vita

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Little Big Planet 2008

Main Series Games

LittleBigPlanet 3 2014 PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3

Sackboy: A Big Adventure 2020 PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4,Pc

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Little Big Planet 2008

Main Series Games

LittleBIG Planet™

Sackboy: A Big Adventure is a more traditional 3D platformer spin-off that still stars Sackboy but places less emphasis on the "Create" feature.

LittleBIG Planet™

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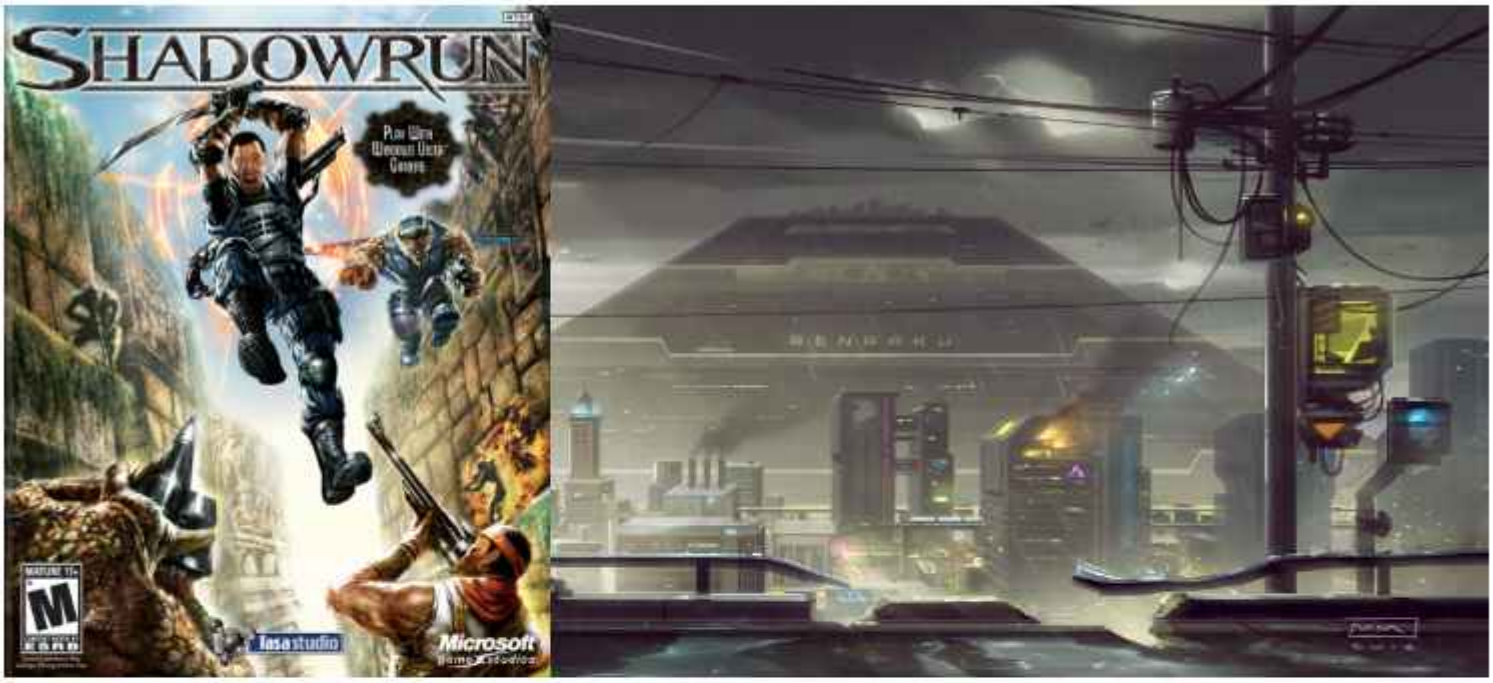
Little Big Planet 2008

🎮 Main Series Games

👨 💻 The Developers

The franchise was originally conceived and developed by the British studio Media Molecule.

Subsequent entries and spin-offs have been developed by various studios, including Sumo Digital for LittleBigPlanet 3 and Sackboy: A Big Adventure and Tarsier Studios.

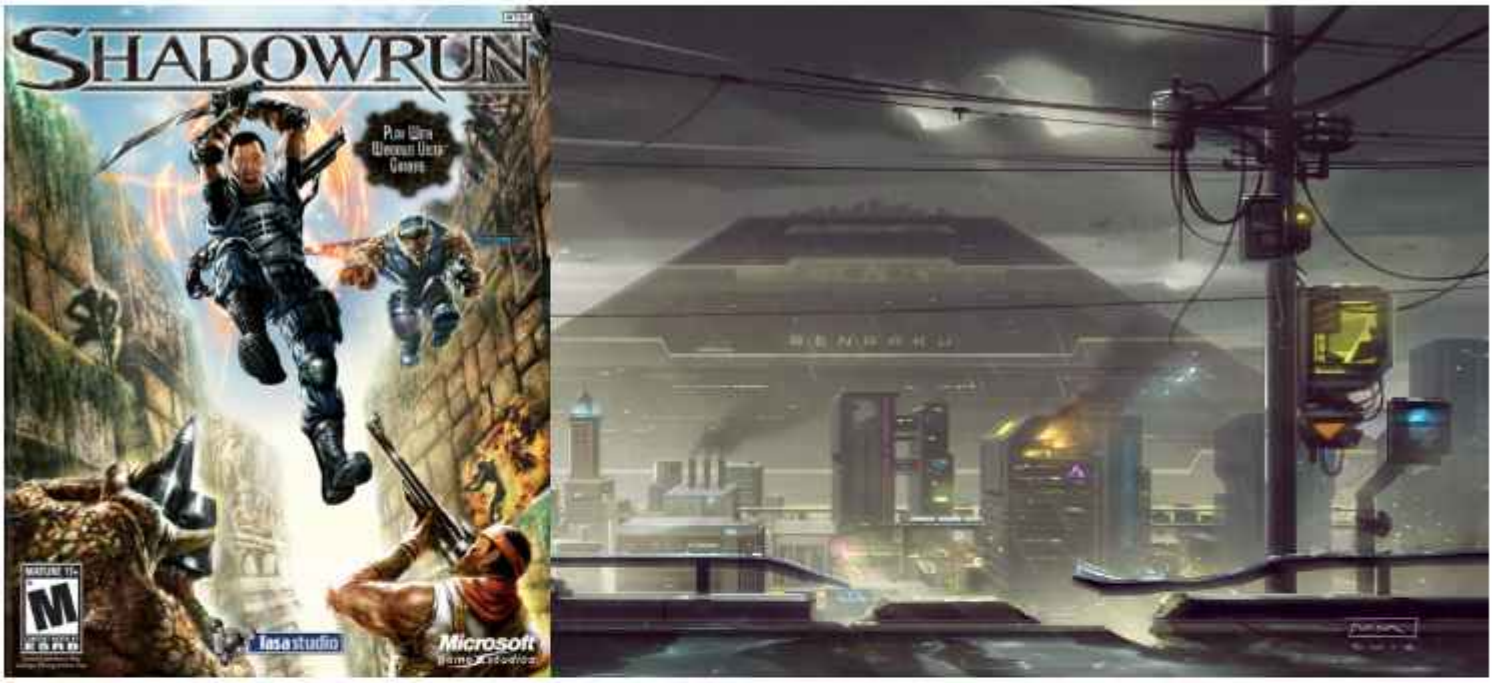


Shadow Run 1993

The Shadowrun video game series is a fascinating example of how a single tabletop RPG universe can inspire multiple, wildly different games across several decades.

The setting is a unique blend of cyberpunk (high-tech, low-life, ruthless corporations) and urban fantasy (magic, elves, trolls, and dragons exist).

The player typically takes on the role of a Shadowrunner, a mercenary who performs illegal corporate espionage and crime ("runs") to survive.



Shadow Run 1993

💾 The Classic Era (16-bit)

Shadowrun 1993 | SNES |

Action-Adventure RPG with a strong linear story and cinematic atmosphere.

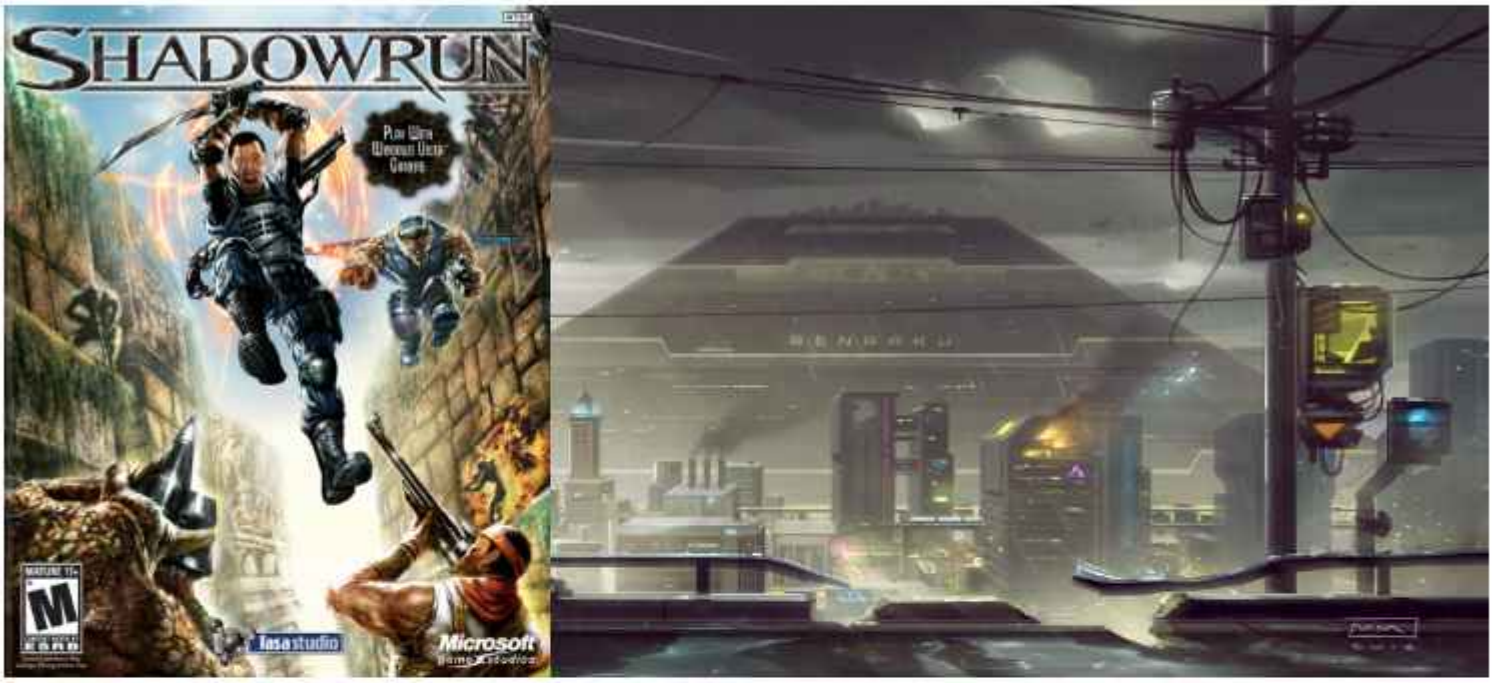
Features an amnesia plot and a mouse-like cursor for real-time combat and dialogue interaction.

Shadow Run 1993

Shadowrun | 1994 | Sega Genesis |

Open-World Action RPG with heavy emphasis on Shadowruns (side jobs) to earn "nuyen"(money) and "karma" (XP).

Closer to the tabletop rules, featuring a more complex Matrix (hacking) system and more freedom for the player.

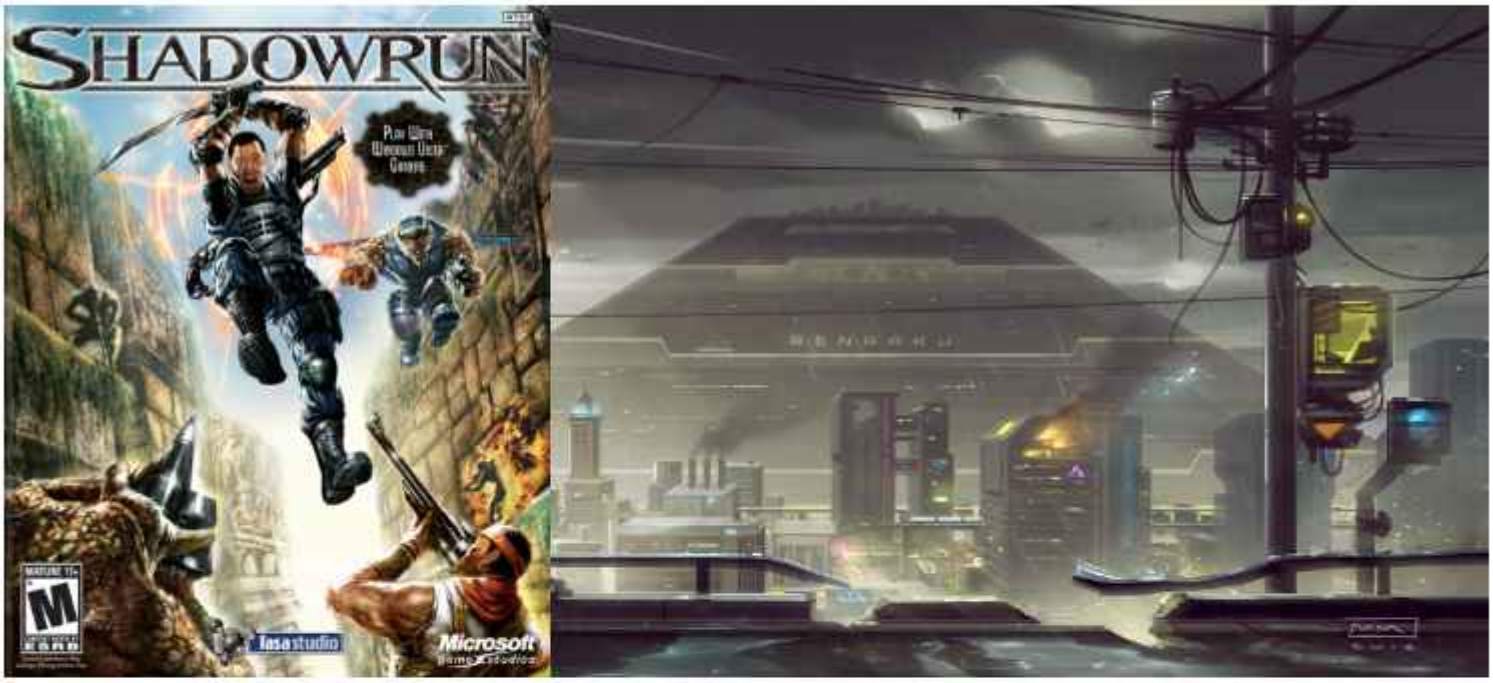


Shadow Run 1993

⚔ The Modern Tactical RPG Trilogy

After a long hiatus and a controversial 2007 first-person shooter (which was not a traditional RPG), the series returned to its RPG roots through a successful Kickstarter campaign.

These modern titles are all turn-based tactical Role Playing Games developed by Harebrained Schemes.



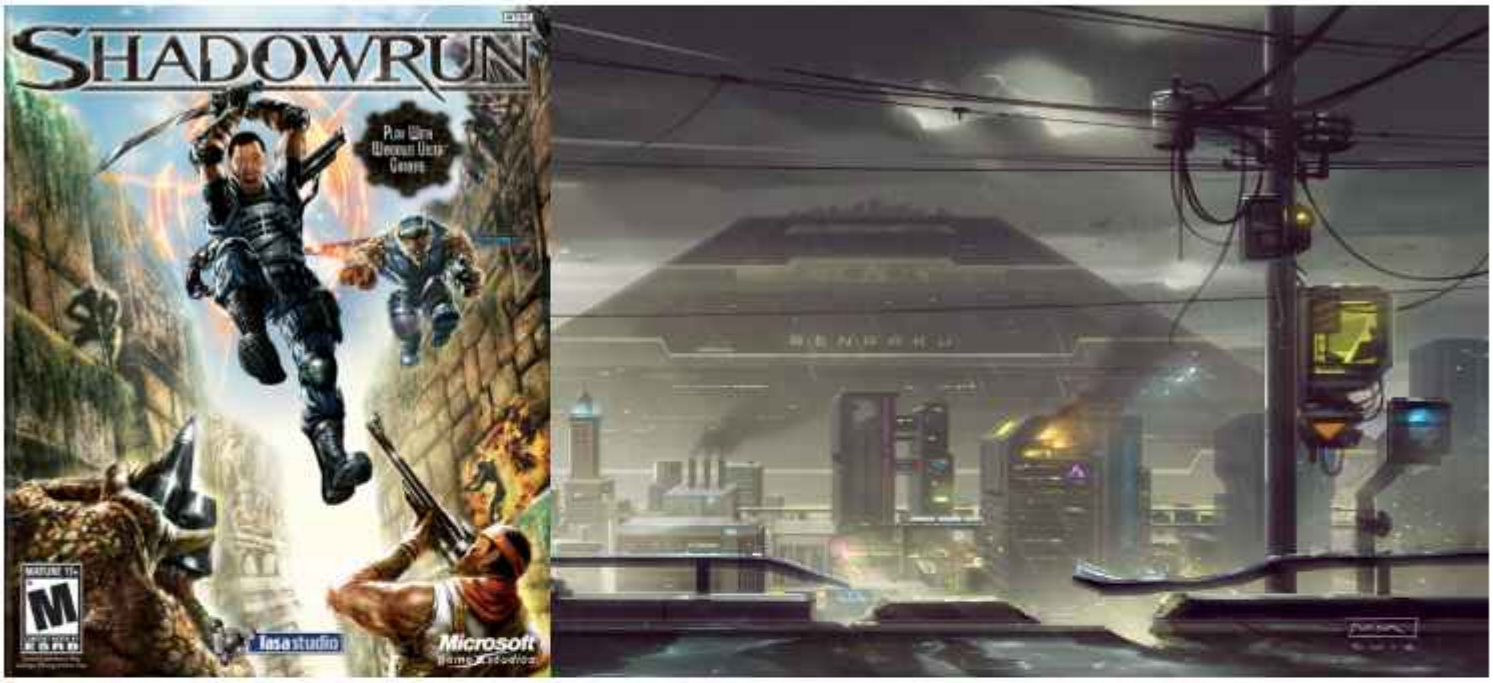
Shadow Run 1993

Shadowrun Returns

| 2013 | PC, Mobile, Consoles |

The first modern entry, reintroducing the core setting with isometric graphics and turn-based combat. It is the shortest and most linear of the trilogy. |

Shadowrun Dragonfall (Director's Cut) | 2014 | PC, Mobile, Consoles | A significant improvement over Returns, praised for its non-linear mission structure, complex character writing, and impactful player choices.



Shadow Run 1993

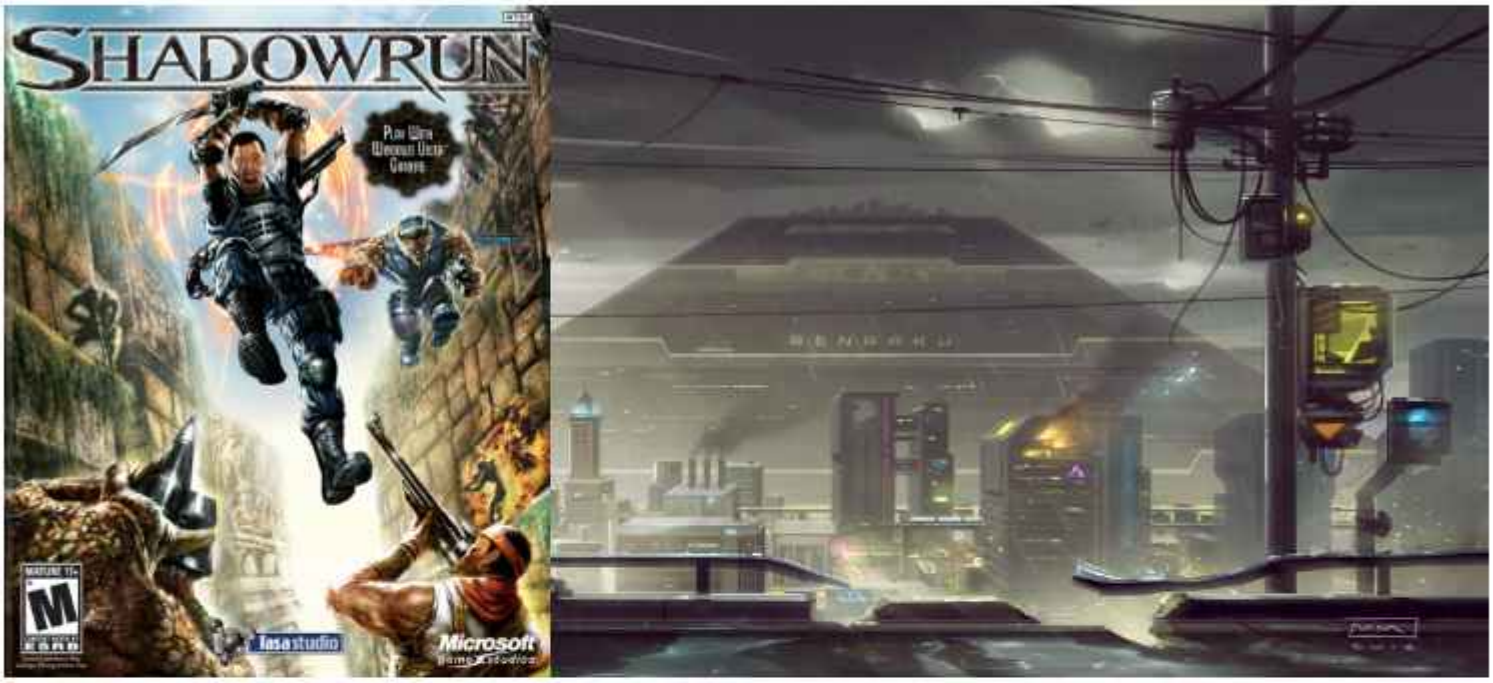
Many consider this the best of the trilogy.

Shadowrun: Hong Kong (Extended Edition)

| 2015 | PC, Mobile, Consoles | Features a new setting and story, with enhanced Matrix gameplay and a strong emphasis on building a close-knit crew.

🎯 The 2007 FPS (An Outlier) Shadowrun (2007): Developed by FASA

Interactive, this was an online, class-based First-Person Shooter (FPS) for the Xbox 360 and PC.



Shadow Run 1993

It attempted to translate the Shadowrun universe's blend of magic and technology into a multiplayer shooter format, but was poorly received by longtime fans who expected a traditional RPG.

If you are new to the series, the Harebrained Schemes trilogy (Dragonfall and Hong Kong in particular) is generally considered the best place to start for a modern tactical RPG experience.

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WILD WILD RACING

Wild Wild Racing 2000

Wild Wild Racing is an off-road racing game that was a launch title for the PlayStation 2 console in North America and Europe.

Game Overview

Platform: PlayStation 2 (PS2)

Release Date (NA): October 25, 2000

Genre: Off-Road Racing / Automobile Simulation
Developer: Rage Software

WILD WILD RACING

WILD WILD RACING

Wild Wild Racing 2000

Publisher: Interplay Entertainment (North America) / Rage Software (Europe)

Gameplay and Setting

Concept: The game focuses on high-speed off-road buggy racing in various global locations.

Locations: Tracks are set in diverse environments around the world, including the American desert,

India, Iceland, Mexico, and Australia.

WILD WILD RACING

Wild Wild Racing 2000

Different terrain types like mud, water, and ice impact vehicle handling, giving it a light simulation feel.

Vehicles: You race in a variety of dune buggies and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).

Game Modes:

Championship Mode: The main mode where you compete in a series of races to unlock new vehicle classes and circuits.

WILD WILD RACING

WILD WILD RACING

Wild Wild Racing 2000

Challenge Mode:

This unique mode includes mini-games used to unlock new vehicles, such as:

Quest:

Finding hidden letters on a track to spell the name of a new car.

Skill: Pushing a large ball through an elaborate "crazy golf" style course.

Stunt: Completing extreme stunt courses with large jumps.

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WILD WILD RACING

Wild Wild Racing 2000

Reception

As a launch title, Wild Wild Racing received mixed reviews.

While praised for its visual quality at the time and its ambitious array of modes, many critics felt the overall racing experience and core gameplay lacked polish compared to other racing titles available on competing consoles.

Bust a Move

The name "Bust-a-Move" has caused significant naming confusion for decades because it's the Western title for a beloved puzzle game, and the Japanese title for a rhythm game.

1 ☐Bust-A-Move (The Puzzle Game)

This is the game most people in North America and Europe know as Bust-A-Move.

Detail	Information
Original Japanese Title	Puzzle Bobble
Developer	Taito Corporation
First Release	Arcade (1994)
Genre	Tile-Matching Puzzle

Bust a Move

| Characters| Bub and Bob (the bubble dragons from the Bubble Bobble series).

🧩 Core Gameplay

The goal is to clear the screen of colored bubbles before they cross the bottom line.

You control a launcher at the bottom of the screen. You fire colored bubbles up at the stack.

Match three or more of the same color to make them pop and disappear.

Any bubbles that are no longer attached to the ceiling or another bubble will fall away for bonus points and combos.

Bust a Move

The ceiling gradually descends, speeding up the action.

The simple, addictive mechanics and the cute characters have made it one of the most popular puzzle games of all time, with numerous sequels across every major console.

BUST-A-MOVE

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Bust A Move

□Bust A Groove (The Rhythm/Fighting Game)

If you see "Bust-A-Move" mentioned in Japan, it is likely referring to this series, which was renamed internationally to avoid conflict with the puzzle game.

Original Japanese Title	Bust a Move
International Title	Bust A Groove
Developer	Metro
First Release	PlayStation (1998)
Genre	Hybrid Rhythm/Fighting Game

Bust A Move

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Bust A Move

Core Gameplay

This game is a unique blend of a dancing rhythm game and a one-on-one fighting game.

Players choose a dancer and compete on a dance floor.

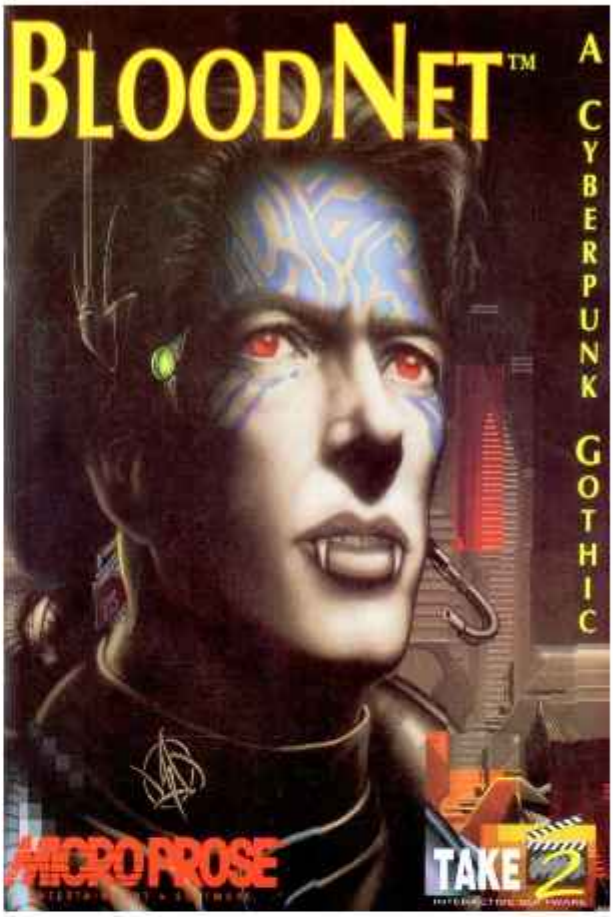
You must input rhythmic commands to the beat of the music.

Successfully inputting commands builds up your score and your "Groove" meter.

At key points in the song, you can interrupt your opponent with Attack Moves or use a flashy "Fever" move, which is the "fighting" element of the game.

The goal is to outscore your opponent with your dancing prowess.

BloodNet Amiga - Pc - MicroProse



BloodNet (1993) Overview

Genre: Cyberpunk Role-Playing Game (RPG)

Graphic Adventure Hybrid.

Initial Release: 1993 (MS-DOS/PC).

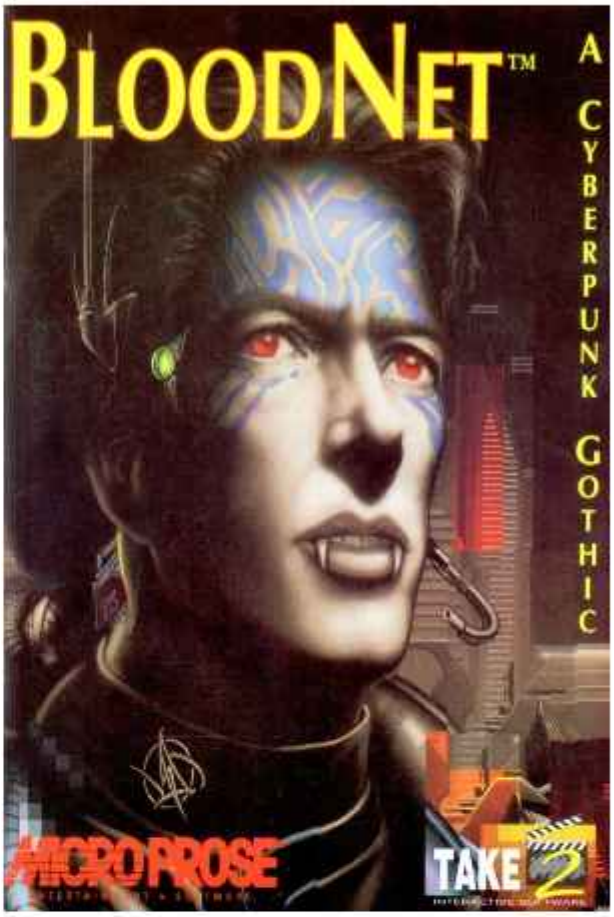
Setting:

A dystopian, future-noir version of New York City where ancient vampires and advanced technology exist side-by-side.

Plot:

You play as Ransom Stark, a private investigator who is bitten by a powerful vampire, Abraham Van Helsing.

BloodNet Amiga - Pc - MicroProse



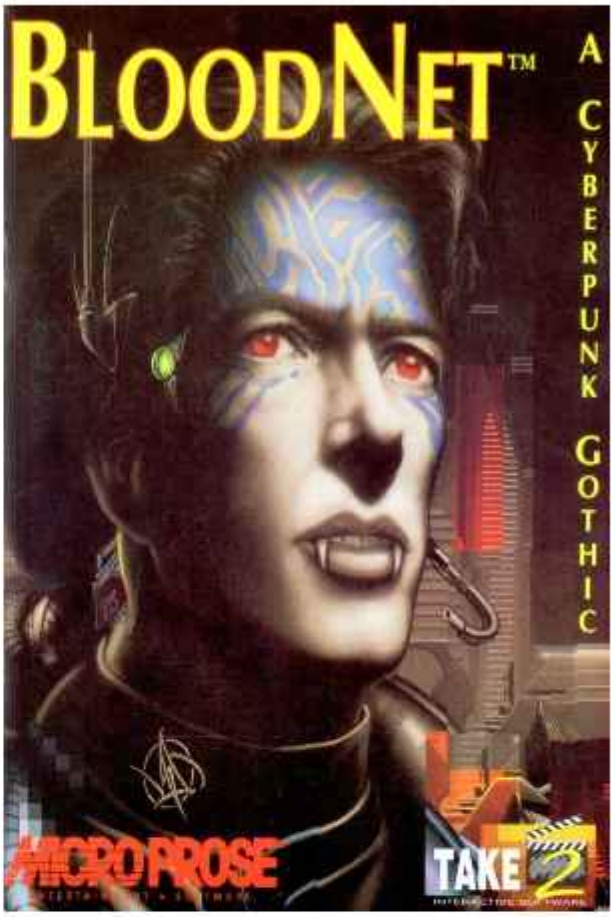
You have 48 in-game hours to find a cure before the vampirism takes over completely.

Key Features: It blends traditional RPG elements (stats, skills, party management) with point-and-click adventure mechanics and features a unique "cyberspace" interface for hacking.

Platform Details

|PC | 1993 | Developed and Published by MicroProse| The original version. The CD-ROM release included a fully voice-acted dialogue, though the quality is notoriously debated by fans.

BloodNet Amiga - Pc - MicroProse



| Amiga| 1994 | Ported by Catfish and Teeny Weeny Games |

This version was released later and had some key differences,

primarily in the audio. |

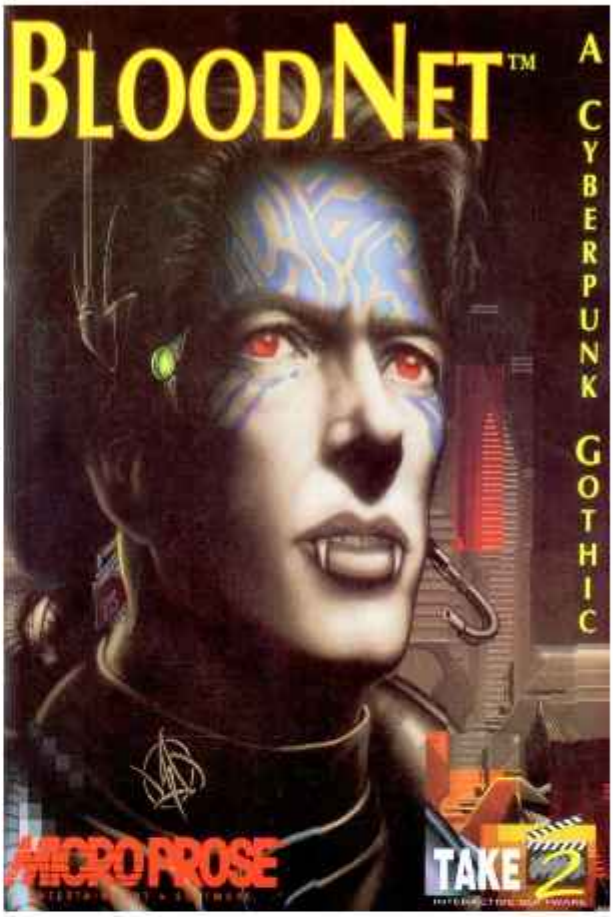
🎵 PC vs. Amiga Version Differences

The primary differences between the DOS/PC and Amiga versions lie in the audio presentation:

Voice Acting:

The PC CD-ROM version included full voice acting for the dialogue.

BloodNet Amiga - Pc - MicroProse



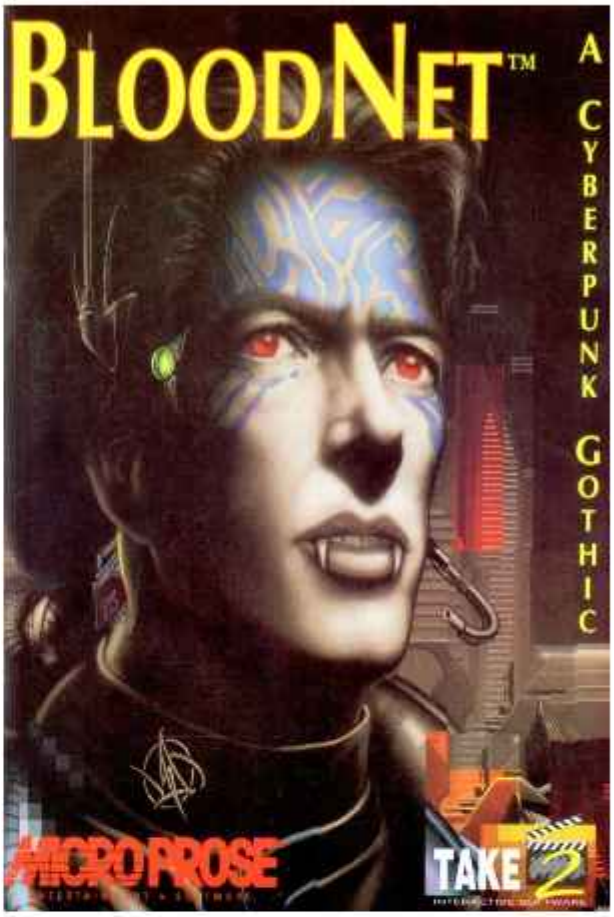
The general consensus is that this voice acting was of questionable quality and often dragged down the pace of the game.

Music/Soundtrack:

The Amiga version (specifically the later AGA chipset version) is often lauded for having a higher-quality and more atmospheric soundtrack compared to the PC's MIDI or AdLib music.

Some fans found the Amiga's music to be more upbeat, while others felt the PC's music was grimier and more fitting for the cyberpunk mood.

BloodNet Amiga - Pc - MicroProse



The Amiga version did not include the voice acting, which many players felt actually made for a better overall experience, allowing them to read the text at their own pace.

In short, while both versions offered the same core game, the PC version provided the option for voice acting, and the Amiga version is often praised for having superior music.

Second Sight

Second Sight is a cult classic third-person action-adventure game, known for its engaging story and inventive use of psychic powers.

It was developed by Free Radical Design (creators of the TimeSplitters series) and published by Codemasters.

Second Sight

Second Sight: Game Overview

Platforms and Release

Initial Release: 2004

Platforms: PlayStation 2, Xbox, Nintendo GameCube, and PC (Windows).

Second Sight

Plot and Dual-Timeline Story

The game is a psychological thriller that is highly praised for its narrative structure.

Protagonist:

You play as John Vattic, an American parapsychology researcher.

Second Sight

The Present:

Vattic wakes up in a high-security U.S. medical facility with amnesia and the sudden knowledge that he possesses powerful psychic abilities.

His primary goal is to escape and uncover the truth about his imprisonment.

Second Sight

The Present:

The Past (Flashbacks):

The game's levels constantly switch between Vattic's present escape and fully playable flashback missions that occurred six months earlier.

These missions show Vattic as a normal man, part of a U.S. Marines task force called "WinterICE," sent to Siberia to retrieve a Russian scientist.

Second Sight

The Twist:

The genius of the story is that actions you take in the past (flashback levels) can influence the conditions and environments you encounter in the present.

The dual-timeline structure builds towards a shocking and critically acclaimed plot twist.

Second Sight

Gameplay and Psychic Powers

Genre Blend:

Second Sight mixes stealth, intense third-person shooter action, and puzzle-solving.

You are encouraged to approach most situations with a combination of these tactics.

Second Sight

Psychic Abilities (Psi Powers):

These are the core of the gameplay, and Vattic unlocks them gradually throughout the story:

Telekinesis: The ability to lift, throw, or manipulate objects and enemies remotely.

This is the most versatile power for combat and puzzles.

Healing: Allows Vattic to recover health instantly by expending psychic energy.

Second Sight

Projection: Vattic can send his spirit out of his body to scout ahead, pass through laser grids, and trigger switches without being physically present.

Charm / Psi-Attack: Used to influence or distract guards.

Psi Blast: A powerful offensive energy attack.

Second Sight

The game is often compared to the simultaneous release,

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy, but Second Sight is generally credited with having a much more compelling and better-written story.

Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

The Summoner series, developed by Volition and published by THQ.

Summoner (PlayStation 2)

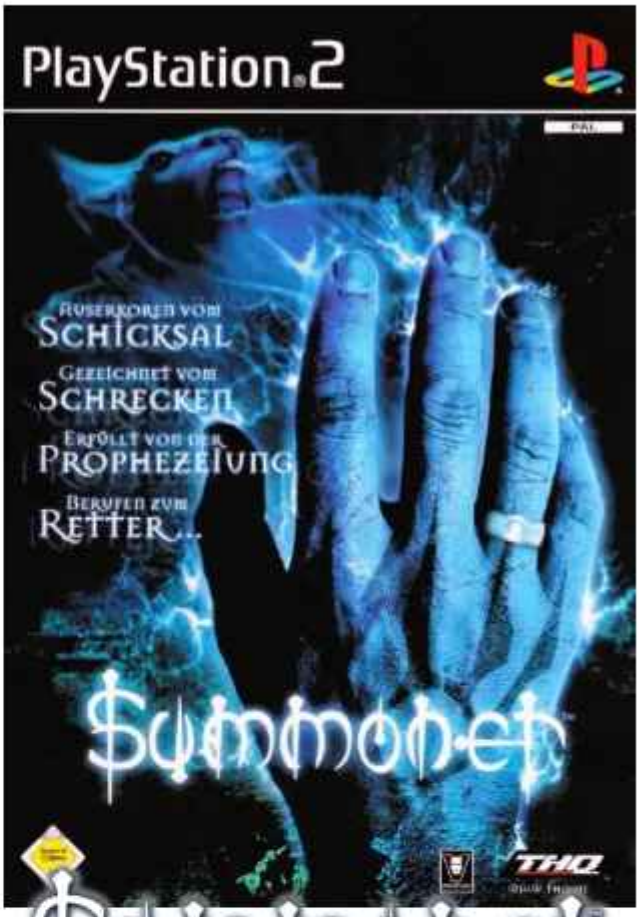
Release Date: October 26, 2000 (North America, PS2 launch title).

Platform: Primarily PlayStation 2

(later ported to PC).

Protagonist:

Joseph, a young man from a remote village who discovers he is the legendary Summoner, destined to fulfill a prophecy.



Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

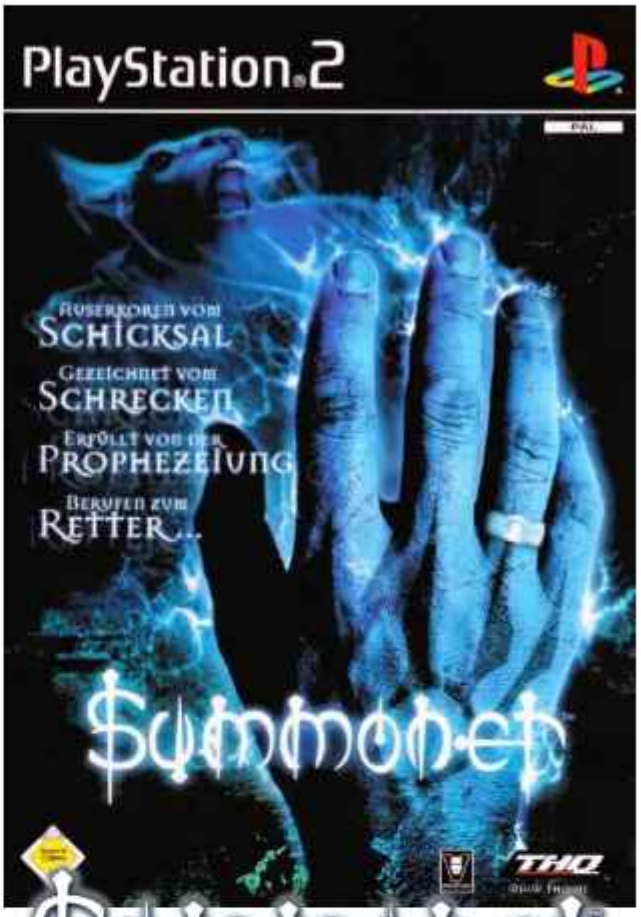
Plot:

The game begins tragically when Joseph accidentally summons a demon that destroys his home and kills his family.

He must then reacquire the ancient Rings of Summoning to defeat the evil Emperor Murod and prevent a world-ending catastrophe.

Gameplay Style:

It uses a real-time combat system with a pause-for-menu element, blending traditional PC RPG elements with console gameplay.



Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

Combat features a "Chain Attack" mechanic where you can string together multiple hits by correctly timing your button presses.

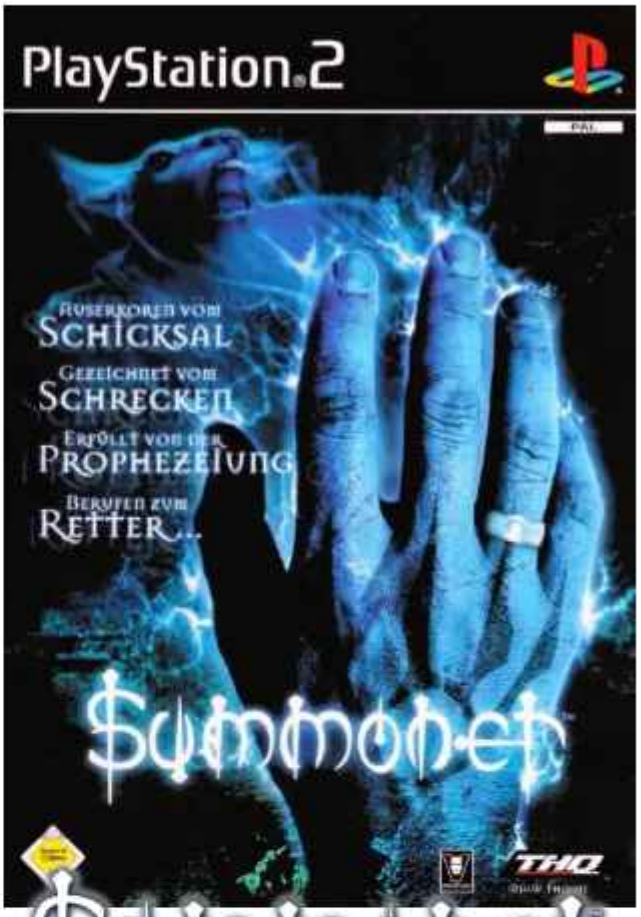
Joseph's main ability is to summon powerful creatures (like demons, golems, and dragons) to fight alongside his party.

Summoner 2

(PlayStation 2)

Release Date: September 23, 2002 (PlayStation 2).

Platform: PlayStation 2 (also released on GameCube as Summoner: A Goddess Reborn).



Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

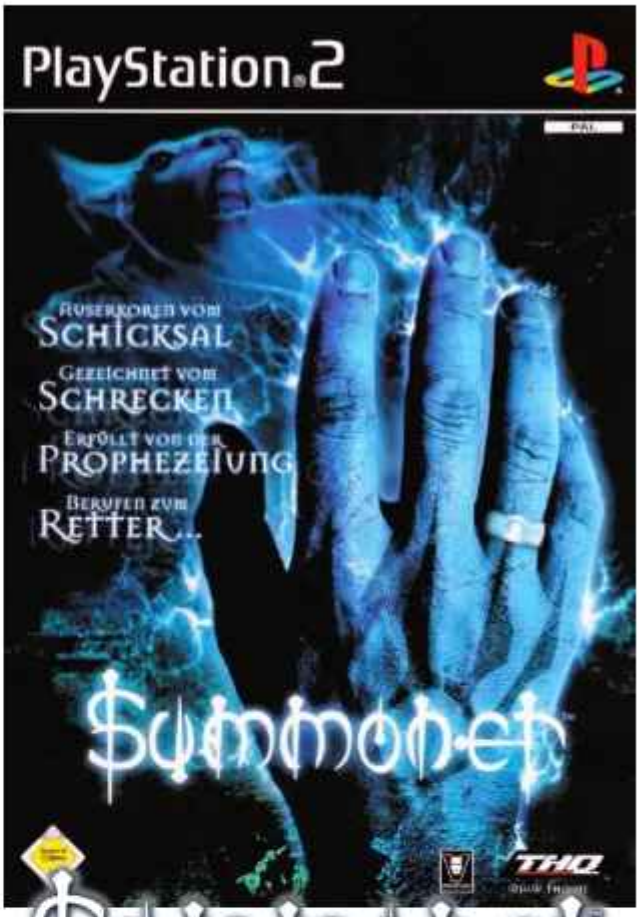
Protagonist:

Maia, the young Queen of Halassar, who is believed to be the human incarnation of the goddess Laharah.

Plot:

Set 20 years after the first game, the story follows Queen Maia as she tries to protect her kingdom and fulfill a prophecy involving the world-tree Eleh.

It introduces a new continent and a story that ties into the mythology of the first game but is largely standalone.

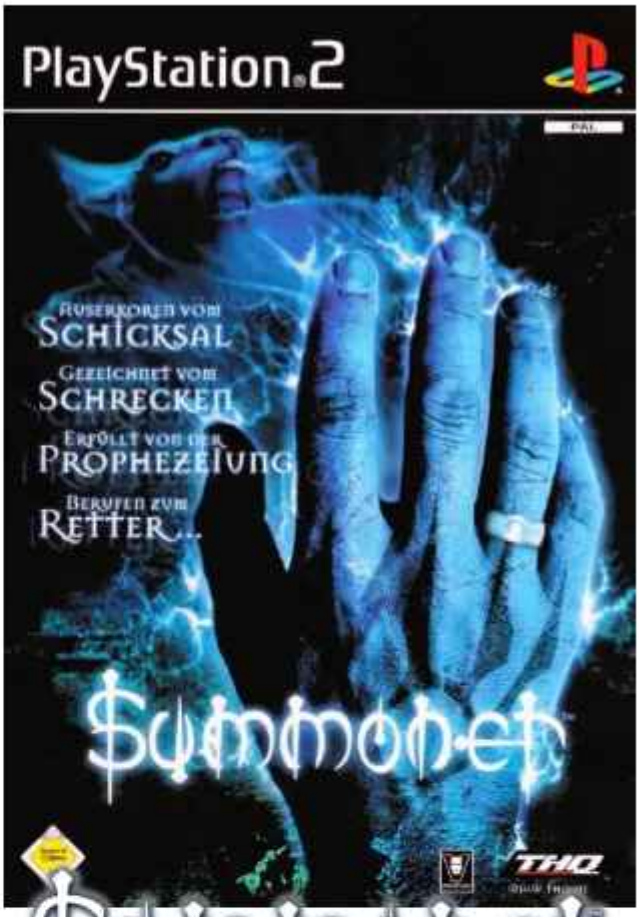


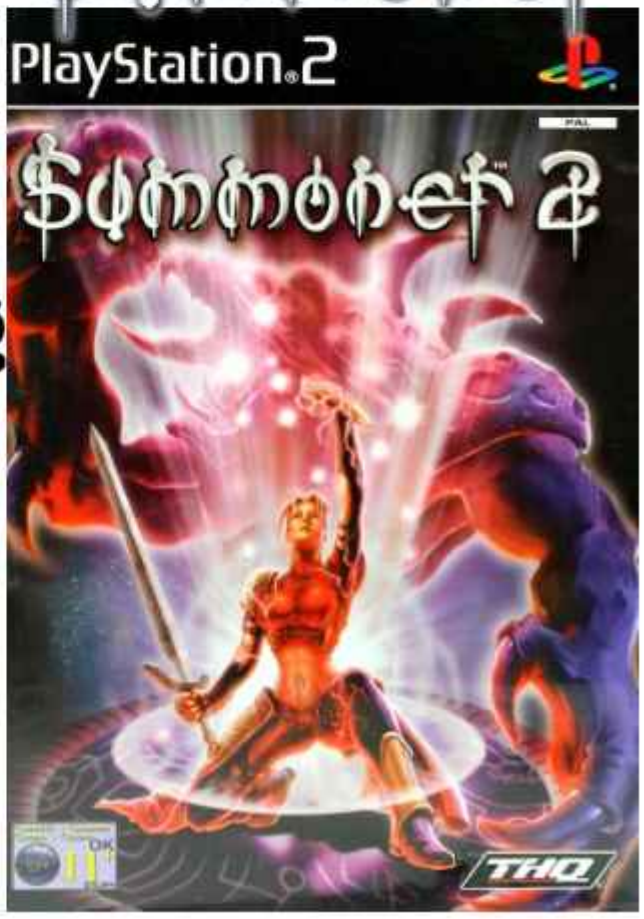
Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

Gameplay Differences from Summoner 1:

More Action-Oriented: The combat system was completely overhauled to be more direct and fluid, giving the player better, immediate control over attacks, moving it closer to a true Action RPG.

New Summoning Mechanic Unlike Joseph, who summoned a separate monster, Maia's summoning power allows her to physically transform into various powerful temporary forms.



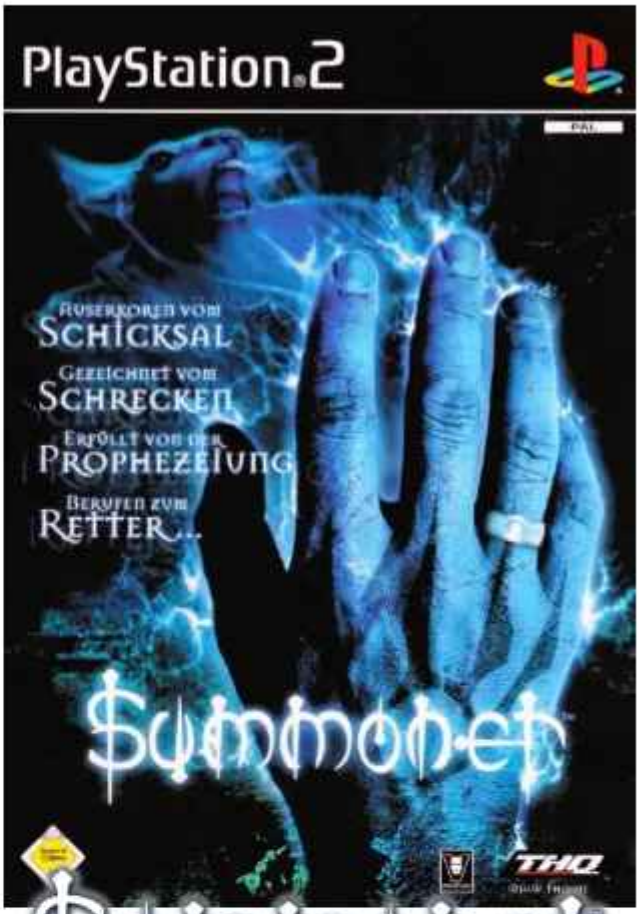


Summoner 1 & 2 PlayStation

Kingdom Management: There are elements of kingdom management where you return to the palace to make decisions as the Queen, influencing the world through optional quests.

In summary, Summoner 1 was a more hybrid, slower-paced RPG, while Summoner 2 focused on faster, more action-based combat with a new protagonist and a distinct fantasy/sci-fi aesthetic.

Summoner



Quake II 1997

Quake II is a classic first-person shooter (FPS) game developed by id Software and originally released in 1997.

It was a significant title that moved the Quake franchise away from the dark fantasy/ Lovecraftian horror theme of the first game and introduced a new, influential military science-fiction setting.

"Quake II, without a doubt, the game of E3."
— Computer Gaming World
QUAKE II
U.S. MARINE CORPS TARGET
U.S. MARINE CORPS 25-METER ZEROING PROCEDURES
19:11
THE LINE BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ERASED.
ACTIVISION
id
"Quake II will establish id as the pre-eminent blastmasters more than ever before."
—PC Gamer
www.idsoftware.com
LINE NO.
EVALUATION

Quake II 1997

Key Details

Developer: id Software (Original)

Publisher: Activision (Original), Bethesda Softworks (Recent Remaster)

Original Release Date: December 9, 1997

Genre: First-person shooter (FPS)

Engine: id Tech 2

Setting: Military Sci-Fi

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Quake II 1997

Plot & Gameplay

Story: The plot centers on a war between humanity and the Strogg, a hostile, cybernetic alien race that attacked Earth.

You play as a marine named Bitterman, the sole survivor of Operation Alien Overlord humanity's failed counter-strike on the Strogg homeworld, Stroggos.

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Quake II 1997

Your mission is to fight alone through the planet's defenses, sabotage the Strogg war machine, and eliminate their leader, the Makron.

Gameplay: It maintains the fast-paced action of the original Quake but features mission-based, interconnected levels, organized into units or "hubs," where completing an objective in one area can affect another.

It introduced new weapons like the iconic Railgun and pioneered features like colored lighting effects.

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EVALUATION

Quake II 1997

Remastered Version (2023)

A critically acclaimed, enhanced version of Quake II was released in August 2023 by Nightdive Studios and Machine Games.

This version includes:

Enhanced Visuals: Up to 4K resolution, widescreen support, enhanced models, and dynamic/ colored lighting.

All Original Content:

The base game and the two original mission packs: The Reckoning and Ground Zero.

Quake II 1997

New Expansion: An all-new campaign expansion, "Call of the Machine," developed by Machine Games.

Quake II 64: The Nintendo 64 version of the game is also included.

Multiplayer: Supports online and local split-screen multiplayer/co-op, with cross play across modern platforms.

It is available on PC, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, and Nintendo Switch.

QUAKE II

GAMER
RETRO Magazine

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Shadow Hearts: Covenant is widely considered one of the best and most unique Japanese Role-Playing Game of the PlayStation 2 era.

It's the second game in the Shadow Hearts trilogy and is beloved for its incredible blend of dark horror, historical fiction, and quirky, irreverent comedy.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Here is a breakdown of the game:

🎮 Key Information

Platform: PlayStation 2 (PS2)

Original Release: 2004 (North America/Japan)

Developer: Nautilus (formerly Sacnoth)

Genre: Japanese Role-Playing Game (JRPG)

GAMER RETRO Magazine

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Setting: An alternate, supernatural version of Earth during World War I (1915), spanning locations across Europe, Russia, and Asia.

📜 Plot Summary

Continuation of the Story: Covenant is a direct sequel to the first Shadow Hearts, picking up six months after that game's "bad" ending.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

The Protagonist: The game once again stars Yuri Hyuga, the Harmonizer who can fuse with demons, who is now protecting a French village.

The Curse: The story begins when a German Army Lieutenant, Karin Koenig, is sent to investigate Yuri and is drawn into a conflict with a secret society called Sapientes Gladio.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Yuri is struck by a magical artifact, the Holy Mistletoe, which curses him and seals away his powerful demon transformation abilities.

The Quest: Yuri, Karin, and an expanding cast of eccentrics travel the world to find a cure for Yuri's curse, leading them into a global conspiracy involving figures like Grigori Rasputin and the Japanese military, all tied to the ongoing Great War.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

The story is a dramatic and often emotional journey that mixes serious themes with intense moments of cosmic horror and bizarre, over-the-top humor.

⚔ Unique Gameplay: The Judgment Ring

The most distinct feature of the Shadow Hearts series is its battle system:

Turn-Based with Skill: Battles are turn-based, but every action (attack, item use, magic) involves the Judgment Ring.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Timing Mechanic: When you select an action, a spinning ring with colored hit areas appears on the screen.

You must press the button at the correct time to land the needle in the hit area.

Risk/Reward: Hitting the small red "Strike Zone" at the very edge of a hit area grants a critical hit or enhanced effect. Missing an area cancels the action entirely.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

Customization: As the game progresses, you can customize the Ring's size, speed, and the number of hit areas for each character, adding a unique, skill-based element to a traditional JRPG system.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

🎭 Characters and Tone

The game is famous for its brilliantly weird and diverse party members:

Yuri Hyuga: The cynical but kind-hearted hero who fuses with various demons.

Karin Koenig: A proud, intelligent German officer and the co-protagonist.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

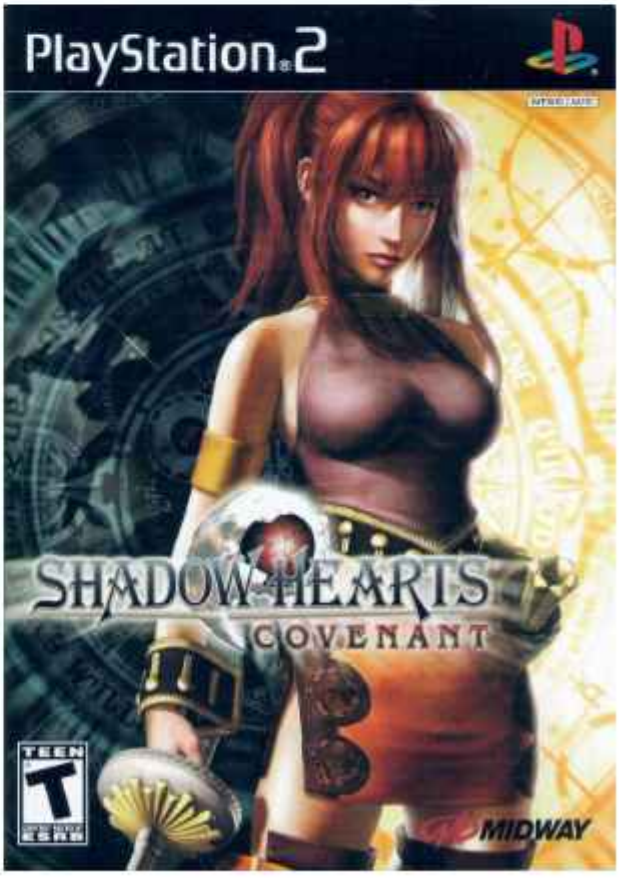
Blanca: An intelligent, talking wolf who has an optional side quest involving wrestling other wolves (Wolf Bouts).

Joachim Valentine: A flamboyant, wrestling-obsessed vampire who can transform into a superhero, a bat, or a giant moth.

Anastasia Nikolaevna: A fictionalized version of the Russian Grand Duchess with a talent for photography and copying enemy skills.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant 2004

The game perfectly balances its darker, more horrific elements with some truly hilarious side quests and dialogue, making it a cult classic for its memorable characters and tone.



GAMER
RETRO Magazine

Champions: Return to Arms

Champions: Return to Arms is the sequel to Champions of Norrath and one of the best and most beloved hack-and-slash action Role Playing Games on the PlayStation 2.

Developed by Snowblind Studios, it uses the same engine as the Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance games, offering a top-down, dungeon-crawling experience set in the EverQuest universe.

Champions: Return to Arms ⚔ Key Information

Platform: PlayStation 2 (PS2)

Release Date: February 7, 2005 (NA)

Developer: Snowblind Studios

Genre: Action RPG / Hack and Slash

Theme: High Fantasy / EverQuest Universe similar, but mission objectives and the "hub" area you return to (Plane of Tranquility for Good, Plane of Fear for Evil) change based on your allegiance.

Champions: Return to Arms

Gameplay: It is classic isometric (top-down view) hack-and-slash.

You create a character, fight massive hordes of monsters, complete quests, earn experience points, and, most importantly, collect mountains of procedurally generated loot (weapons, armor, gems, etc.) to improve your character.

Champions: Return to Arms

The combat is fast-paced, visceral, and highly satisfying.

Classes and Features

Import Feature: A major selling point was the ability to import characters from the first game, Champions of Norrath, allowing you to continue leveling up high-level heroes.

Champions: Return to Arms

New Classes: In addition to the five returning classes (Barbarian Warrior, Wood Elf Ranger, High Elf Cleric, Erudite Wizard, Dark Elf Shadow Knight), two new playable races/classes were introduced:

Vah Shir Berserker: A cat-like melee expert known for raw damage and throwing axes.

Iksar Shaman: A lizard-like spell caster and warrior hybrid.

Champions: Return to Arms

Co-op & Online Play: This was one of the PS2's best co-op experiences.

Local Co-op: Up to 4 players on one console (with the PS2 Multi tap accessory).

Online Co-op: Up to 4 players online via the PlayStation Network, a feature that was a huge draw for the series.

Champions: Return to Arms

Medal Rounds: These were new, self-contained arena challenges (mini-games) that awarded special items and were a great way to test your character's build and grind for rare loot.